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241524Z Mar 06

UNCLAS ADANA 000057

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: TURKEY: NEWROS CELEBRATIONS QUIET IN SE TURKEY

1. (SBU) Participation in this year's March 23 Newroz celebrations was generally lower than in past years throughout Turkey's southeast. The celebrations were generally peaceful with comparatively few instances of violence reported. Our contacts in the region, as well as media reports, said that security forces generally treated people courteously. Our contacts in Diyarbakir estimated that turnout at the celebrations there may have reached 400,000, in spite of rainy weather conditions. Our contacts in Van told us that turnout at celebrations there reached nearly 200,000, also in spite of inclement weather conditions. (Note: We think these estimates are inflated. End note.)

2. (U) According to press reports, rock and Molotov-cocktail throwing Newroz celebrants clashed with police in Adana on March 20, resulting in at least one police officer injured and no arrests. Six police officers were reportedly injured in a rock-throwing incident in Diyarbakir on March 20, while one officer was injured during minor clashes between celebrants and police in Silopi. Jandarma intervened against a group of 80 celebrants in Erzincan who were holding an unauthorized Newroz celebration. Twenty-six of the group members were detained for violating the law on demonstrations and gatherings.

3. (U) The press reported on March 22 that the National Security Directorate announced that between March 19 and 21, eighty-nine people nationwide had been detained on grounds that they carried pro-PKK/Ocalan banners and shouted pro-PKK/Ocalan slogans during Newroz celebrations. Eight people had been arrested as of March 22, but that number could increase as police continue to identify wrongdoers from videotaped footage. The Security Directorate reportedly announced that a total of 414,000 people participated in the 89 celebrations held in 45 provinces and 36 districts around Turkey. These figures represented a 25 percent decrease in the number of Newroz participants compared with last year.

4. (U) In reaction to the peaceful Newroz celebrations, people from both government and pro-PKK factions called for peaceful solutions to the Kurdish issue. Co-Chair of the DTP Ahmet Turk called for a peaceful resolution through democratic means, and renewed his side's call for a PKK and government-forces ceasefire and general amnesty for the PKK, according to press reports. Turk publicly thanked the people and the security forces for a peaceful Newroz. DTP co-Chairperson Aysel Tugluk said that "people showed what they wanted, namely peace and democracy. People showed that they considered the Turkish Parliament and the government as responsible authorities to solve the Kurdish issue through democratic means."

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